

Submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into Public School Funding (Victoria)

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School: Streeton Primary School — Small Metropolitan Government School

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the *Inquiry into Public School Funding*. I write as the former School Council President of Streeton Primary School, a small metropolitan government school with approximately 130 students. I held this role for four years and worked closely with the Principal, staff and families, advocating strongly to the Department of Education on issues relating to school funding.

My experience at Streeton Primary highlighted just how stark the inequities are between small schools and larger metropolitan schools, inequities that will be further impacted by the Allan Labor Government's decision to delay increasing Victoria's share of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) until 2031, effectively removing \$2.4 billion previously committed to government schools.

Streeton Primary's experience represents the reality for many small metropolitan schools. Fewer students mean less funding, which limits the ability to attract families, which in turn limits funding further. This cycle will only worsen under continued underinvestment.

1. Funding per student and the disadvantage for small metropolitan schools

Victoria already funds its government students at the lowest rate in the country, yet we consider ourselves the Education state. For a small schools like Streeton Primary, the gap is more pronounced because fixed costs do not shrink simply because a school has fewer students.

Examples from Streeton Primary:

- With ~130 students compared to nearby schools with 500+, Streeton Primary receives far less total funding despite facing **similar fixed operating costs** for staffing, administration, essential programs and grounds maintenance.

- School Council faced annual budget pressures that required **difficult cuts to classroom budgets and specialist programs** (e.g. Kitchen and garden program, impacts to dedicated sports teacher/program).
- Larger schools nearby, with four times the students, benefit from economies of scale and can offer **more specialist subjects, more intervention support, and more attractive facilities**, which understandably draw families in.

The combination of limited funding and competition with significantly larger schools, creates a structural disadvantage that small schools cannot overcome without adequate state investment. As a result, small schools rely heavily on voluntary student financial contributions. It is evident that government funded "standard curriculum requirements" does not align with public expectations and falls short of supporting the full scope of educational needs. State schools should have equal opportunities, but funding gaps and weak Department strategic planning fuel competition.

2. Impact of the delay on Commonwealth funding and long-term planning

For small schools, certainty in funding is essential, yet it is increasingly rare.

At Streeton Primary:

- Planned wellbeing programs, digital learning upgrades, and specialist initiatives will be **put on hold or cancelled** because the pathways expected under state Commonwealth partnerships may not materialise.
- As a school council, we often found ourselves unable to commit to multi-year improvement plans because the funding environment was unstable.

Small schools cannot plan properly when funding sources shift unpredictably.

3. Impact on students - present and future

The students at Streeton Primary will feel the effect of this funding delay deeply. Small schools do not have surplus resources to absorb system-wide cuts.

Examples from a small school context:

- **Reduced intervention programs:** With fewer staff overall, any reduction in funding immediately impacts literacy or numeracy support. Streeton Primary saw intervention time impacted because staffing allocations could no longer stretch far enough. This issue worsens when other funding sources (e.g. individual support services for significant student behavioural needs) is decreased or cut. It should also be noted that support for invention is restricted

to students who meet stringent funding criteria, resulting in many students being unable to access these opportunities.

- **Larger composite classes:** Small schools already rely on composite classes; reduced staffing leads to **higher numbers in those composite classes**, creating more complex learning environments with fewer support options.

Students at small schools should have the same access to support and resources as those in larger schools. Under the delayed SRS, that gap will widen further.

4. Pressure on the teaching and school workforce

Underfunding is felt acutely in small schools because every role is stretched.

At Streeton Primary:

- Teachers often held **multiple responsibilities or leadership roles** simply because there were not enough staff to spread the workload.
- Casual relief teacher (CRT) shortages have a disproportionate impact when a small schools cannot access CRTs, **planning time disappears entirely**, contributing directly to burnout.
- Specialist programs **had to be cut back** or combined due to funding constraints, reducing variety in the curriculum and increasing workload for classroom teachers.

Small schools rely heavily on dedicated staff who often go above and beyond, but without adequate funding, this goodwill is strained.

5. Capital works: the “lottery ticket” problem for small schools

One of the most challenging realities for Streeton Primary was the **significant delay and uncertainty** around capital works.

Small schools have fewer facilities but **the same maintenance needs**, and often older infrastructure. Yet the capital funding model effectively forces schools into a competitive, opaque process that resembles a lottery.

Streeton Primary’s experience:

- Streeton Primary has waited **years** for essential capital improvements only to receive emergency maintenance funding due to severe building disrepair.

- Despite repeated advocacy efforts, ranging from comprehensive submissions to direct conversations with senior Department of Education staff and local government ministers, progress remained slow and inconsistent.
- Larger schools with higher enrolments often attract capital investment more readily, as they are seen as “higher-impact” projects. (e.g. multiple capital funding works for Viewbank Primary ~\$10m, Watsonia Heights Primary ~\$8m),
- The Department capital grants system often felt like a **lottery**, where merit or need did not necessarily determine outcomes.

Small schools are repeatedly left behind, and progress is slow because the model appears to favour scale rather than prioritise need.

Conclusion

As the former School Council President of Streeton Primary School, I have observed that small metropolitan government schools experience a disproportionate impact from Victoria’s persistent underfunding. The decision to delay reaching 75% of the SRS until 2031 will:

- widen the gap between small and large schools
- deepen existing inequities in access to programs, facilities, and staff
- place greater pressure on already stretched budgets
- limit intervention and supports for students
- prolong unacceptable delays in capital works
- undermine parent confidence in small local schools

Most importantly, it will disadvantage a whole generation of children who cannot wait until 2031 for the standard of education they deserve today.

Restoring the \$2.4 billion commitment and accelerating progress to full SRS funding is essential to ensure that small schools like Streeton Primary are not left behind.

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